

When Newark Was Younger



Newark's first Federal Building was this structure erected in 1857 on the site of Newark Academy. Razed in 1869 to make room for a new post office, its business was carried on for eight years in the Old First Baptist Church shown in left background.

The Early Mails

**General Store at 'Four Corners'
Subbed as Post Office in First
Days of City's Postal Service**

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JOHN BURNET, first postmaster of Newark, would be vastly astonished if he were to walk into the Federal Building through the entrance nearest Franklin street. For there stands the Mailomat, a machine so efficient that it will accept coins for whatever postage you wish to pay; then, at the turn of a knob, it will stamp and mail your letters.

John Burnet, like all Newark's postmasters until about 1850, kept the post office in his store. His appointment in 1790 was Newark's first experience of Federal patronage. His father, Dr. William Burnet, was a friend of President Washington, having been Surgeon-General of the Army. Burnet's store, where the Kinney building now stands, was across Market street from the Tavern.

From Newark the mail was carried to Philadelphia by the "Excellent Running Machines" which made the trip in a day, driving the four shifts of horses to exhaustion. There were no home delivery or mail as we know it. Citizens who expected letters called for them, unless they were picked up by friends, or carried to their houses by enterprising little boys who expected to be well paid for their trouble. After "Wood's Newark Gazette" began publication, letters not called for were advertised in the newspapers.

POSTAL service in New Jersey in the days of Newark's first postmaster is thus described in The Newark Daily Advertiser of about 100 years ago: "In 1791 there were only six offices in New Jersey—Newark, Elizabethtown, Bridgetown (Rahway), Brunswick, Princeton and Trenton. The total of their receipts, for the year ending October 5, 1791, was \$530, of which the postmasters received

\$108.20 leaving \$421.80 as the net revenue."

This regular mail service established so soon after the end of the Revolution meant a great deal to Newark. During the war the passage of letters had been sadly disrupted; the post boys, riding horseback with the mail in saddlebags had to detour far back in the country, to escape the Red Coats. A letter from a young woman who lived in Basking Ridge during the last days of the century described the local mail man.

He wore a blue coat with yellow buttons, scarlet vest, leather breeches, blue yarn stockings, a red wig and a cocked hat. As he rode along on horseback or in his sulky he occupied the time knitting a pair of stockings! These mail men were not paid by the government in the earliest days, they were in business for themselves, and carried letters, packages and newspapers at varying rates. Letters accompanying packages went free; the weekly newspapers were carried for a certain amount per quarter, \$2 for Essex County subscribers.

JOHN BURNET ran the Newark post office 14 years and went out of office along with other Federalists when Jefferson became President. Matthias Day, whose store was a few doors south, at the corner of Mechanic street (now Edison place) became postmaster in 1804, and served 30 years. Later during his term he moved to a building about where Raymond boulevard now crosses Broad street. Postmasters were then paid on a percentage basis; in Mr. Day's last year he earned \$1,591.86, out of which he paid rent, fuel, lights, stationery and clerk hire.

The fact that Benjamin Franklin,

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How they "carried the mail" in Vailsburg before annexation to Newark—as R. F. D. wagon and carrier at start of service in 1896.



All that is left of this second Federal Building is a great hole in the ground, vacant these 12 years, at Broad and Academy streets. Oddly unbalanced style of Romanesque architecture was attributed to fact that the building, dedicated in 1898, was designed for another city and that Newark got only half of it.



At the end of the line in Irvington Center on a wintry day in the 1900's. The street cars transported mail as late as 1922, particularly during the railroad strikes following World War I.

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YOUNGER NEWARK'S 'AERIAL MAIL'

(Continued from Preceding Page)
 First Postmaster General, had organized the postal system and that postmasters were regularly appointed did not mean that letters were sure of reaching their destinations. A correspondent in Newark could write to a large city and expect to have his letter delivered fairly promptly but when writing to country relatives his letters might be delayed for a week, opened and read, or even mislaid.

THE actual transportation of the mail by stage was handled on a contract basis. General Cummings, the same man who had a part in the building of our first bridge, held the contract in 1813. The Postmaster-General, Gideon Granger, thought that General Cummings was not sufficiently conscientious in fulfilling his contract. Lacking secret service men, he decided to investigate the service himself. Some one tipped off the general, and he warned the stage driver. With Gideon Granger as a passenger, the stage lurched furiously across the meadows. Mr. Granger remonstrated; the driver was firm. He MUST drive fast, he carried the United States mail. Mr. Granger alighted black and blue all over at the Tavern at Newark's Four Corners!

Newark's city government had been organized for a dozen years before the post office had any home other than the shop of whatever man was postmaster. In the 1850s a room was set aside for the post office in the Library Hall, built for the Newark Library Association in 1847. By this time one great improvement had been effected. The United States had begun the use of postage stamps, the first of these being issued in 1847. Privately printed, they were a 10-cent issue engraved with the Stuart painting of Washington and a 5-cent issue bearing Franklin's portrait.

Envelopes also came into use while the Post Office occupied the Library Hall. Originally letters were simply folded and sealed with wax, the address being written on the outside. Introduced from France in 1842, envelopes were first considered a freakish fad that would not last. For a long time it was not thought polite to use envelopes in private correspondence. Before 1847 the prepayment of postage was optional and letter postage was rated not by weight but by distance and by number of sheets of paper used.

THE first government-owned Post Office building in Newark was erected at Broad and Academy streets on land bought from the Newark Academy, which had built there in 1792. The school building was razed and the Federal Government erected a combined Post Office and Customs House in 1837.

NEWARK SUNDAY NEWS



One of the first mail planes taking off from Heller Field after its opening in 1919. Work on the Forest Hill airport was started earlier in the year and picture in upper left shows workmen felling trees on the tract. Doors for the steel hangar in upper right were fashioned from the crates. A ball field now occupies site.

Many of the services we know today were introduced while the Post Office occupied the first Federal Building. Street letter boxes were provided in 1858, money orders in '64, postal cards in '73, and special delivery in '85. Though letters could be delivered in 1836 for an additional fee, free city delivery did not come until Civil War time.

By 1880 there were 20 carriers and 20 clerks in the office. The square stone building was already badly crowded, and the Board of Trade and other civic organizations were agitating for a new post office. Plans were approved in 1890, construction on the same site began in 1894 and the building was completed in 1898.

The Romanesque style building presents several mysteries. In the first place, by the time the post office was completed, it was already too small, and it was reported that the plans had been intended for another city. Also, no one has ever been able to find a cornerstone, or any record of a cornerstone laying. If there is such a stone, it must be imbedded in the walls of one of the Newark swimming pools, for the limestone was used for this purpose when the building was razed in 1937. What they did find was a huge stone eagle, rescued from a warehouse by B. Palmer Davidson of Upper Montclair. Carved by Robert Shirley, uncle of Cephas I. Shirley, former business manager of the Board of Education, it graced the front of the old building. Over it the American flag was draped during the dedication ceremonies in 1898.

THE massive old building saw many improvements in postal service. The postal savings system was introduced in 1911 and parcel post in 1912. Just

after World War I the air mail service developed.

Newark played an important part in air mail history. Thirty years ago the Postmaster General induced the government to try out the short run from New York to Washington as an experiment. President Wilson and a group of officials witnessed the very first flight from a polo field along the Potomac on May 15, 1918. The New York end of the flight was at Belmont Park in Long Island, and letters were carried at 24 cents an ounce.

Newark's civic clubs immediately became interested. An aerial mail service committee was formed to raise \$25,000 to build an airport. Failing to collect more than \$8,000, they contributed this for hangars on ground leased by the United States Post Office Department from Paul Heller in Forest Hill. Excavation started in the Spring of 1919 on Heller Field. In November Charles I. Stanton, Eastern Superintendent of Mail Service, arrived to supervise the final preparations, and on December 6 Charles W. Fremming, manager of the Belmont Park field, took active charge of the station.

ON hand to greet the arrival of the first mail for Heller Field on December 8, 1919, were Postmaster John Sinnott and Theodore S. Fetting, chairman of Newark's Aerial Mail Committee. Coming in that afternoon with 13 bags of mail weighing 700 pounds, Pilot Walter H. Stevens landed his plane of the Martin bomber type which had taken off from Washington in a raging snowstorm. Mechanic Victor Main accompanied him. The mail was taken on a motor

truck to the Market Street Station for transportation to New York.

Among those who recall vividly the historic landing is J. Clinton Wells of Newark. A young boy at the time, he hung around the field whenever school was out. Always ready to lend a hand, to help stumps and carry water, he was there when the first pilots came over from Belmont Park.

Helping with flying logs, packing suitcases, he walked and talked with the men who pioneered the air mail flights. He ate with them in the little shack at one end of the field far distant from the old Morris Canal. When freight cars rolled in on the adjacent track of the Orange Branch of the Erie, bringing crates from Belmont Field, he belted and hip up the crates to fashion crude doors for the corrugated steel hangar.

Because Assistant Postmaster General Otto Praeger did not want the formal dedication to take place until flights were well established, the official exercises were postponed to December 15. J. B. Corridon, Superintendent of Air Mail Service and Lt. James C. Edgerton, Superintendent of Flying, came up with him from Washington for the exercises.

STAMP collectors treasure letters sent on the first flights out of Heller Field to Cleveland, Chicago and Washington. They bear the date December 8 and the cancellation stamp "Eastern Terminal, Air Mail Service, Newark, N. J." All air mail dropped at the Newark Post Office was so stamped during the brief time Heller Field operated. Twenty-seven post employees were based at the field, and 23 more were employed at a general airmail warehouse in Newark.

Western flights became more and more important during 1920 and service was extended to Omaha and San Francisco. As Heller Field was found to be too small for the additional flights, Hazelhurst Field, Long Island (now Mitchell Field) was developed. Although the two-year lease from Mr. Heller did not expire until December, the New York to Washington air mail was discontinued, for reasons of economy, on May 31, 1921. The warehouse was moved to Chicago in 1922, and Newark did not again become a center of air mail activity until Newark Airport was opened in 1929.

Air mail contracts were the chief topic of Postmaster General Farley's speech at the dedication of Newark's handsome new Post Office in Federal Square in 1934. As was fitting, Postmaster Sinnott drove down to the Bridge Street Bridge to welcome Mr. Farley, driving to Newark over the same route followed by Gideon Granger on his rough-and-tumble trip of inspection so many years ago.

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